

**Full comments submitted in response to the Draft EA for Dome Mountain WMA Hay Lease Renewal:**

Comment 1:



[EXTERNAL] Dome



Bert Otis <otisranch@wispwest.net>

Sat 20-Feb-21 07:40

To: Yarnall, Michael

Dear Fish Wildlife & Parks Commission,

I support the continued lease of the Dome Mountain Agricultural Land. The lessee has done a good job of doing what they are suppose to do. If these hay fields were left without irrigation and renovation they wouldn't be hardly worth anything for wildlife habitat. This is a win/win for everyone.

Thank you

Bert Otis

PO Box 60

Emigrant, MT 59027

[Reply](#) | [Forward](#)

## Comment 2:

← [EXTERNAL] Dome Mountain WMA Agriculture Lease EA 

 jerrydimarco@mail.com  
Fri 12-Mar-21 13:42  
To: Yarnall, Michael

    

Hi Michael,

I have some questions about the Dome Mountain WMA EA.

- 1) Since the agriculture field is sandwiched between wetlands, was the field a wetland area prior to its use for growing hay?
- 2) In the Water analysis, no impacts were noted. However, doesn't the agriculture use (irrigation, pesticides, fertilizer, harvest) affect the wetland downstream? Impacts to ground water from leaching of fertilizers was noted in the analysis.
- 3) In the Fish/Wildlife analysis, no impacts were noted. However, wouldn't the agriculture activities disturb at least bird species in the area, including nesting activities?
- 4) Could private landowners improve their fencing to keep elk and deer off their land?
- 5) Usually the length of the lease is specified in the narrative.

Thank you for your time,

Jerry DiMarco  
Bozeman

 Yarnall, Michael  
Mon 15-Mar-21 11:10  
To: jerrydimarco@mail.com

   

Jerry,

Thanks for reaching out. Please see answers to your questions below. If you have more questions or would like to make a comment, please let me know.

- 1) The conversion to hay meadow happened prior to FWP's acquisition of the property, so I can't say with complete certainty. However, I do not think the area was a wetland, given the topography.
- 2) There is by necessity some use of fertilizer and herbicides to control noxious weeds, but the run-off potential to the wetland is minimal. If the field were not in continued production, the need to control noxious weeds would increase in coming years. This, coupled with reduced total vegetation cover means that if hay production ceased, the potential for herbicide run-off would actually increase if the area were not in hay production.
- 3) Disturbances from the agricultural activities are minimal, limited primarily to a couple days of hay cutting annually, and only on the agricultural field (nesting birds that might use Daily Lake and the associated wetlands are not impacted). When taken in the context of the overall benefits to wildlife, FWP believes any small disturbances are acceptable. The wildlife section of the Draft EA finds that no changes would result from the proposed action because this would be a continuation of a long-standing arrangement that benefits wildlife overall.
- 4) Landowners could choose to exclude animals from their property if they desired. However, this would result in a landscape that is further fragmented and more impermeable to wildlife passage. This would be detrimental to a landscape-scale perspective towards conservation which FWP strives for.
- 5) The proposed lease renewal is 5 years, as specified on page 1.

Thanks,  
Michael

Michael Yarnall  
Livingston Area Wildlife Biologist  
Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks  
(406) 224-1162

 jerrydimarco@mail.com  
Tue 16-Mar-21 14:41  
To: Yarnall, Michael

   

Hi Michael,

Thanks for your prompt reply. I was looking for the lease length in the Narrative summary discussion, completely missed it at the top of pg 1.

In 3), I was referring to birds that might nest in the agriculture field. Understand your point about overall benefits to wildlife.

In 2), it does not make sense that the noxious weed problem would get worse if the haying operation ceased. Would the lack of irrigation be a factor in reduced vegetation? If so, what is the weed problem on the other grasslands in the area? They must have been used for winter range for millennia before the WMA was designated. Are you battling weeds on those grasslands? Thank you for your time.

Jerry



Yarnall, Michael  
Tue 16-Mar-21 15:16  
To: jerrydimarco@mail.com



Jerry,

You are correct that there is some potential for disturbances to birds which may nest on the hayfield. However, the single cutting schedule means that haying activity occurs primarily in mid-late July. This offers time for many species to hatch prior to cutting. Again, FWP considers this small potential for disturbances to be acceptable within the larger context which primarily benefits wildlife.

If hay production were to cease, the residual alfalfa would eventually decline, and yes without irrigation ground cover would decline. We do have weed problems in the area, both on the native grasslands above the hayfield, and on the hayfield. Some weeds are very widespread (e.g. cheatgrass), but there are others (e.g. hoary alyssum). Because the hayfield has been converted from grassland (i.e., it is a disturbed site) it would be more vulnerable to further degradation by weeds without continued cultivation/maintenance. The haying activities help FWP manage weeds because the lessee controls weeds on the field, allowing FWP to focus limited resources on other areas. Some weed management is accomplished with herbicides, but the cutting activity helps control some weeds too, e.g. hoary alyssum is a biennial and cutting can help prevent it from going to seed. I hope that helps explain why weed control efforts would need to increase absent the haying activity.

Thanks for your interest and concern. If you wish to submit a formal comment, the deadline is 18 March.

Michael

Michael Yarnall  
Livingston Area Wildlife Biologist  
Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks  
(406) 224-1162

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jerrydimarco@mail.com  
Wed 17-Mar-21 14:38  
To: Yarnall, Michael



Thank you for the additional information. I guess it's the best solution for a bad situation. My only comment would be, if it's helpful to expand the WMA, I would support that. Thanks for your time,

Jerry